



Q&A: Potential Republican Government Shutdown

January 19, 2018

Will I receive my Social Security and SSI payment?

During a government shutdown, recipients will continue to receive their Social Security and SSI payments. However, a shutdown suspends the issuance of Social Security cards. On a typical day, approximately 60,000 Americans apply for Social Security cards, which they may need to be able to start a job, take out a loan, open a bank account, or conduct other financial transactions. During a shutdown, no Social Security cards are issued.

Will I still get my mail?

Yes. The approximately 500,000 Postal Service employees are exempt from furlough because the Postal Service is self-funded.

Which federal employees keep working during a government shutdown?

When there is a government shutdown, federal agencies are required to classify their employees as either "essential" or "non-essential." The employees classified as "essential" continue to work during the shutdown. However, the employees classified as "non-essential" are put on unpaid furlough. In the 2013 16-day shutdown, about 800,000 of the 2.1 million civilian federal employees in the executive branch were classified as "non-essential" and furloughed.

Do furloughed federal workers get back pay?

That is up to the Congress and White House. The precedent has been that furloughed employees are later paid, through enactment of legislation. [The Washington Post explains](#), "The precedent is that furloughed employees are later paid; that was done in the most recent partial shutdown, in October 2013. (There was a separate set of unpaid furloughs in some agencies in spring and summer 2013, related to "sequestration" budget caps; those employees were not later paid for that time.) Legislation has already been introduced in Congress to provide back pay if a shutdown happens. Incidentally, those who are furloughed could not substitute annual leave or other forms of paid time off for that unpaid time, and previously scheduled leave would be canceled. They could take other jobs but only those allowable under government ethics rules restricting outside income. They also could apply for unemployment benefits, but states typically impose a waiting period of a week or more before benefits begin, and further require that anyone paid later for furlough time must return any unemployment benefits they received."

If I'm a federal employee, what happens to my health insurance and TSP?

Federal employees will continue to receive their health benefits even if their agency doesn't make premium payments on time. "Since the employee will be in a non-pay status, the enrollee share of the [Federal Employee Health Benefits Program] premium will accumulate and be withheld from pay upon return to pay status," [OPM wrote in its shutdown guidance](#).

The Thrift Savings Plan will operate as normal during a government shutdown. Furloughed employees enrolled in the TSP will not be able to make contributions to the plan while they're not getting paid. TSP participants can request a financial hardship withdrawal, though certain conditions apply.

What will happen to military personnel?

The Defense Department [issued guidance on Friday](#) saying that in the event of a shutdown, "Military personnel on active duty, including reserve component personnel on Federal active duty, will continue to report for duty and carry out assigned duties."

[Washington Post's fact-checker summarizes](#) the situation regarding their pay: "There would be no gap in their pay unless the shutdown lasted past Feb. 1, and otherwise they would continue on the job without getting paid until the shutdown ended or until Congress and the president agreed to cover their costs before it ended."

I'm a veteran. How will the shutdown affect me?

Military retirees and those receiving Survivor's Benefit Plan payments would still receive their regular checks. VA disability pay and GI Bill payments are also unlikely to be affected by a brief shutdown. However, [Military.com](#) points out that during the last shutdown, VA officials warned that if the closure extended beyond several weeks, disability checks were unlikely to go out to more than 5.1 million veterans.

During a government shutdown, all VA medical facilities and clinics will remain fully operational. However, VA call centers and hotlines cease to function, and Veterans Benefits Administration public contact services are not available. In addition, the 2013 16-day shutdown stopped progress in reducing veterans' disability claims backlog, which had previously been progressing at a rate of almost 20,000 claims per week. In addition, during the 2013 16-day shutdown, many veterans lost access to vocational rehabilitation and education counseling services.

What happens to Medicare and Medicaid?

Medicare, Medicaid, and disability insurance would be largely unaffected by a government shutdown. Current beneficiaries [would continue to receive their benefits](#). Doctors and hospitals will continue to receive reimbursements.

How will the shutdown affect immigration, border protection, and customs?

Most Immigration, Customs, and Border Protection agents will remain on duty through a shutdown. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will be largely unaffected by a shutdown because its work is largely funded by application fees.

What happens to federal courts?

Federal courts are expected to continue normal operations for the time being, [according to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia](#). However, courts may move into contingency plans if the shutdown continues. [The Supreme Court](#) will rely on non-appropriated funds to maintain operations during a short-term lapse in funding.

How does a shutdown affect the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control?

In the case of a shutdown, approximately 50-percent of the Department of Health and Human Services' 80,000-member staff is likely be furloughed, [Vox reports](#). "That includes the people at the CDC who monitor disease outbreaks, the researchers at the National Institutes of Health who are looking for disease cures, and the inspectors at the Food and Drug Administration who look out for pharmaceutical and food safety."

During a shutdown, NIH shuts down most medical research taking place on its campus in our district. prevents the enrollment of patients in NIH Clinical Center studies, and stops reviewing medical research grant applications and making or renewing research grants.

Although America is currently experiencing a [severe seasonal flu epidemic](#), the CDC will likely have to freeze much of its seasonal influenza program during the shutdown.

Will happens to food safety inspections and activities?

During a shutdown, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is unable to support the majority of its food safety activities. The 2013 16-day shutdown sharply curtailed critical FDA food safety inspections of domestic and international food facilities.

Will National Parks and museums be open?

The Interior Department is working to keep national parks "as accessible as possible." Officials have said that the anticipated plan is to keep many national parks open for hiking, wildlife watching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Open-air parks and monuments in Washington, D.C. will remain open. However, other services that require National Park Service staff, including campgrounds and concessions, will be closed. The Washington Post published draft guidance from the National Park Service outlining how it could maintain public access to parks during a lapse in appropriations [that you can read here](#).

[According to NPR](#), the Smithsonian Institution says its D.C. museums and the National Zoo would remain open for the weekend, but will close on Monday if the government shuts down.

How will this affect FEMA natural disaster clean-up efforts?

FEMA would still respond to emergencies, but the Trump administration has not clarified how many workers, if any, would continue with long-term projects. [It's unclear](#) how ongoing FEMA recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida and California from recent hurricanes and wildfires will be affected.

What happens to federal housing loans?

During a shutdown, the Federal Housing Administration stops approving applications for housing loans. During the 2013 16-day shutdown, the FHA delayed processing over 500 applications for loans to develop, rehabilitate, or refinance around 80,000 units of multifamily rental housing.

Can I still get a small business loan?

No, a shutdown pauses federal loans to small businesses. During a shutdown, the Small Business Administration (SBA) stops approving applications for small businesses to obtain loans and loan

guarantees. During the 2013 16-day shutdown, the SBA was unable to process about 700 applications for \$140 million in small business loans.

Will commercial flights be cancelled?

Air traffic controllers, Transportation Security Administration officers and Customs and Border Protection agents would remain on the job, [so air travel should be mostly unaffected.](#)